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A Great and Rising Nation: Naval Exploration and Global Empire in the Early U.S. Republic

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policy issues. Those issues, already complicated, rapidly will become even more complicated, thorny, and demanding. Decision makers will need to understand them. Lushenko and company have provided the means to do so.

RICHARD NORTON



A Great and Rising Nation: Naval Exploration and Global Empire in the Early US Republic, by Michael A. Verney. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2022. 320 pages. \$35.

The United States of the early nineteenth century had its hands full developing stable commerce and establishing a lasting government under the new constitution; it rarely is thought of as having been an imperialist power. Even so, there were a few at the time who felt that the United States should exert influence beyond the nation's borders. In particular, through naval exploration the nation could open new trade markets, contribute to scientific knowledge, and raise American cultural credibility with foreign powers. Michael A. Verney, assistant professor of history at Drury University, in Springfield, Missouri, contends that while some in the early 1800s viewed naval exploration as an unwarranted expenditure that invited governmental overreach, by the late 1850s it had become a popular expression of early American imperialism. Verney's *A Great and Rising Nation* describes this evolution of naval exploration in the antebellum United States; while initially the United States merely was emulating European exploration, "that European spark had to be kept alive and nourished in a U.S. context" (p. 6).

Easily the most interesting aspect of Verney's work is his presentation of

episodes of American naval exploration as different dimensions of imperial power. The first was commercial exploitation; it was not until the mission of pure research was superseded by a focus on improving navigation in the Pacific Ocean that the U.S. Exploring Expedition, or "ExEx," of 1838–42 received broad government support. The charts that the ExEx produced meticulously noted the location of scores of Pacific islands and reefs, which allowed American whalers to exploit more hunting grounds in the region safely. After the U.S. Navy was eclipsed by Army successes during the Mexican War, the service conducted a survey of the river Jordan and Dead Sea to draw notice to itself; some also considered that these efforts might provide scientific proof of biblical events, thereby solidifying America's place as "God's empire." In the 1850s, multiple expeditions to the Amazon and Río de la Plata broached the possibility of expanding U.S. agriculture (and transplanting the enslaved labor necessary to cultivate it) to South America. By that time, conservative elements in slaveholding states had come to see some benefits of naval exploration; moving portions of the increasingly unwieldy enslaved population to colonies in Brazil might provide a necessary "safety valve for our Southern States" (p. 147). Finally, American efforts to rescue from the Arctic any survivors of Great Britain's Franklin expedition in the second half of the 1840s demonstrated to European eyes that the United States possessed the morals and generosity of a great nation.

In addition to describing the progress and specific events of each expedition, Verney vividly relates each one to the sweeping social, political, and economic changes that characterized the antebellum United States. His biographical

sketches of major explorationist players such as Jeremiah Reynolds, Charles Wilkes, and William Francis Lynch help to place their expeditions in context; their motivations for exploration are just as important to Verney's work as the expeditions themselves. America's early explorers frequently were tempted to match European examples. In unsuccessfully advocating for an early ExEx in the 1820s and then striking out on private expeditions, Reynolds sought to emulate Prussia's Alexander von Humboldt. Similarly, when Lady Franklin agitated multiple governments to search for the missing HMS *Erebus* and *Terror*, the Arctic expeditions funded by Henry Grinnell helped to demonstrate that American virtue equaled that of Britain.

As the nineteenth century progressed, expedition journals became increasingly popular reading among middle-class American families, as they allowed tantalizing glimpses of a wider world. In many cases, including the five-volume ExEx narrative, they reinforced contemporary notions of white superiority and American values. Pacific Islanders frequently were likened to Native American tribes in terms of their perceived savagery and lack of societal development. When the National Gallery opened above the U.S. Patent Office, curiosities that the ExEx had gathered formed the bulk of the collection. Bones of Fijian natives were displayed alongside weapons allegedly used to kill U.S. sailors; these and references to nineteenth-century craniology offered pseudoscientific proof of white racial superiority. Likewise, proslavery expeditions to South America scouted potential colony sites, where enslaved Africans would require the superior reasoning, industriousness, and leadership of whites to perform the hard labor in tropical climates for which they

were believed to be suited biologically. In 1848, Lieutenant William Lynch worked to champion American religious beliefs and scientific thought alike by searching for physical evidence of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah while conducting a meticulous survey of the river Jordan and Dead Sea. Finally, *Arctic Explorations*, published by Elisha Kent Kane, showed American men surviving one of nature's most punishing environments.

The naval expeditions examined by *A Great and Rising Nation* took place during a time of sweeping change. Amid the uncertainty of the antebellum period, white Americans could look to naval exploration for reassurance as their fellow citizens gained new knowledge that benefited commerce, demonstrated perceived racial superiority over peoples encountered abroad, proved their manliness and strength in direct competition with nature, and earned the respect of European nations.

Verney's book ends with the United States being recognized as a potential great power pursuing imperial ambitions. That status came not from applying raw military strength but by judiciously applying scientific inquiry, engaging in diplomacy, seizing commercial opportunities, and practicing humanitarianism.

MICHAEL ROMERO



Sun Tzu in the West: The Anglo-American Art of War, by Peter Lorge. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2022. 237 pages. \$29.99.

Sinologists long have been concerned that our understanding of China's military culture begins and ends with *The Art of War*. They suggest that more attention be paid to how this ancient